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Just, Natascha ; Büchi, Moritz ; Latzer, Michael

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## **A Blind Spot in Public Broadcasters' Discovery of the Public: How the Public Values Public Service**

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Confronted with new technological options, changing usage patterns and rising criticism, public service broadcasters (PSBs) are paying fresh attention to the public as a target for accountability. This article first investigates how PSBs are repositioning themselves through increased responsiveness to and collaboration with the public and assesses the permissibility of such strategies, bearing in mind the traditional ethos and core principles of public service. The second part reacts to the finding that, while there is much talk about the public and the need to reconnect, little is known about the public's perception regarding the importance of the idea of public service in times of media change. Results of a Swiss representative case study show that people still consider public service highly important in times of the Internet. Unexpectedly, linear regression and structural equation modeling reveal that this assessment is virtually independent of sociodemographics and individual values.

*Keywords: public service broadcasting, accountability, public service, institutional and individual values, representative survey, structural equation modeling*

The debates about the future of public service broadcasting (PSB) are not coming to an end and continue to challenge both the concept and the attendant organizational structure of PSB in Europe (Just & Latzer, 2011). Arguments in favor of PSB have shifted from techno-economic considerations to value-based arguments (Nissen, 2006), which increasingly emphasize the often conjointly applied concepts of accountability, responsiveness and cooperation, as well as public value.

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Although accountability has long been a constituent yet disputed property of media organizations (McQuail, 2003), this concept—especially for PSB—has also experienced a shift. This concerns observable changes with regard to the forums to which public service broadcasters (PSBs) are accountable (Bardoel, 2003; Jakubowicz, 2010; Van den Bulck, 2015). Traditionally, PSB was responsive to and held accountable by politics. As of late, however, increasing market pressure, individualization, diversified media use, and growing public opposition to fees have led to a situation where they are gradually discovering the general public as a target for accountability. Accordingly, they aim to respond to changing audience demand through various responsiveness and collaboration measures, and at justifying their existence and communicating their value by explaining, consulting, and conversing with the general public through various means. The European Broadcasting Union's (EBU, 2012) declaration on the core values of public service media (PSM) and the associated self-assessment report (EBU, 2016) are indicative of this. Its six core values include accountability, implying the need to listen to audiences and engage in meaningful debate.

Coupled with this, the concept of *cooperation*—both as an overall tool to strengthen PSB's legitimacy and as a management tool to better involve the general public and other partners—has gained prominence. Essentially, cooperation and its conceptual counterparts such as coproduction (Collins, 2007; Moore, 1995), partnership (Raats, 2012), network (Murdock, 2005), or participation and cocreation (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2016) are considered indispensable for repositioning PSB in this changing media landscape and are seen as essential means of producing public value. The concepts of cooperation and public value have expanded simultaneously as both have been imported into the social scientific and political PSB debates from public management writings. Analyses of national and European Commission governance reactions to PSB indicate how public value has become the key term for the legitimization of such services (e.g., through the introduction of compulsory public value tests; Just & Latzer, 2011). As per the revised European Broadcasting Communication (European Commission, 2009), new or modified services of European PSBs have to undergo *ex ante* testing with regard to their market impact and public value, the latter denoting the extent to which they meet the democratic, social, and cultural needs of a society (public value or Amsterdam tests). Such tests have been introduced in various European Union (EU) member states proactively or reactively, with names such as the Public Value Test (United Kingdom), *Drei-Stufen-Test* (three-step test, Germany), or *Auftragsvorprüfung* (*ex ante* remit test, Austria).

The introduction of the public-value concept into the PSB debate has also led to a theoretical reemphasis and greater attention to what individuals desire and value, as opposed to what political decision makers presume to be in the public interest (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Moore, 1995). Although these opposing views are comparable to those that have recurrently accompanied the discussions on the public interest concept—Is the public interest what interests the public or what is in the public interest?—this emphasis on the individual symptomatically echoes the current "(re)discovery" of the public and the individual as essential targets and partners for a viable PSB future.

While much is known about the arguments of politics and private media regarding PSB, the question of how users—especially in their function as citizens—appreciate and perceive public service has, so far, been a blind spot that is rarely considered. This article contributes to filling this gap. It first assesses how PSBs aim to reposition themselves through accountability measures targeted at both

increased responsiveness to and collaboration with the public. This is followed by a case study of how the public values PSB in Switzerland. Based on representative survey data, it analyzes the public's perception of the significance of public service in times of the Internet in general and regarding the performance of the Swiss public service broadcaster (SRG) in particular. Using descriptive statistical analyses, linear regression, and structural equation modeling, it examines whether and how people's appraisal of PSB is connected to sociodemographics and to their individual human values, namely, to the values of security, self-direction, and hedonism (Schwartz, 1992).

### **Repositioning PSB: The New Attention to the Public**

Accountability pertains to the media in at least three ways: First, in their capacity as watchdogs or the Fourth Estate, the media hold others accountable. Second, mostly by self-regulation, they have created various instruments such as press councils, ethical guidelines, or ombudsmen through which they hold themselves accountable. And finally, various stakeholders—politics, regulators, shareholders, or users—hold the media accountable. It is this latter conception of accountability that is relevant for this article, because it focuses on changes in PSBs' relationships with the relevant stakeholders, most important, its new attention to the public—understood as the aggregate of all citizens—and the public's perceptions of public service.

Owing to their politically allocated responsibilities and societal functions, since their inception PSBs have been subject to particular scrutiny from politics and increasingly and most recently from competitors. Van den Bulck (2015), for example, describes a progressive shift in accountability of PSBs from state to market, that is, from a "self-evident" position as public institutions with a self-evident legitimacy and accountable only to governments and the elites to a situation where PSB "is becoming subject to accountability to the market and its commercial competitors, thus having to fight against forces that push [it] from the centre to the margins" (p. 71). Similar to earlier assessments of PSBs' relationships with stakeholders (e.g., Bardoel, 2007; Scannell, 1989; Ytreberg, 2002), the public/user plays a subordinate role in Van den Bulck's analysis. She argues that audiences are not the target for direct accountability, but mostly—and this only in their role as individual media consumers—are an important factor in accountability measures. Accordingly, this focus on the user as consumer, coupled with accountability measures that center on performance benchmarks like audience reach, do not live up to the ideal-type view of accountability to the citizenry (Van den Bulck, 2015).

Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that it is precisely this above-mentioned conflict, which—coupled with politically imposed obligations, technological challenges and market developments as well as observable public discontent with the workings of PSB—forces PSB to (re)connect with the public, whether in its role as collective citizenry or audience or as individual consumer, user, or participant (for a typology of broadcasting-viewer relations, see Syvertsen, 2004).

### ***From PSB to PSM: Responsiveness and Collaboration***

The question of how and how far PSB succeeds in redefining its relationship with the public, especially with younger strata, while simultaneously adjusting to new technological realities have been

identified as key for its future survival (Jakubowicz, 2007). As many argue (e.g., Lowe & Bardoel, 2007), this presupposes a conceptual transition from PSB to the technologically neutral term PSM, which liberates PSB from its technological legacy of traditional broadcasting and makes it possible to renew and redefine the public service ethos for a multimedia environment. Such a redefinition, which includes the expansion of the public service mission to the Internet, has been pursued, accompanied by legal and political debates as well as criticism from private competitors who repeatedly allege infringements of EU regulations and other competition distortions caused by public funding (Just & Latzer, 2011). Criticism has not ceased, even though the revised Broadcasting Communication (European Commission, 2009) politically confirms the principle of technology neutrality and thus the legitimacy of going beyond traditional broadcasting and using all means of distribution to fulfill the public service remit (Just, Latzer, & Saurwein, 2012). This liberation from technological legacy then permits the necessary move from the traditional transmission mode of PSB to the communication mode of PSM, also implying a shift from supply orientation to demand orientation (Bardoel, 2007).

Such moves, both of which are gradually observable (the latter already since the establishment of a dual broadcasting system), would in all likelihood permit increased responsiveness to, involvement of, and eventually cooperation with users. However, they also raise the question of whether, to what extent, and on what conditions this is compatible with the original public service ethos of serving society as a collective, guided by principles of universality of access and content. For example, is a continuous focus on audience appeal and the development of a *personalized* public service reconcilable with this traditional idea, or does this only provide further breeding ground for criticism and calls for institutional reform? Andersson Schwarz (2016) asks, for instance, whether “PSB integration with platform logics compels a different conception of ‘publicness,’ where, for example, the historical legacy of reaching majority audiences (‘catch-all’ strategies) would be relinquished in favor of a more granular approach, serving in parallel numerous minority interests” (p. 126). In a similar vein, Sørensen (2013) “questions whether the idea of ‘public’ in terms of the public sphere would be threatened by media personalization” (p. 60). Altogether, the observed change from mass toward increasingly personalized and individualized media consumption may affect PSM’s role of sustaining political, social, and cultural cohesion (Nissen, 2013), and result in the weakening of bonds with traditional media institutions, in particular, PSBs (Just & Latzer, 2016).

First personalization efforts by PSBs are under way (Andersson Schwarz, 2016; Kant, 2014; Sørensen, 2013) and increasingly facilitated by new technologies, most prominently by automated algorithmic selection (Just & Latzer, 2016; Latzer, Hollnbuchner, Just, & Saurwein, 2016). Swiss Radio and Television (SRF), for example, stores usage data in local storage or as cookies to personalize the use of its online service Play SRF and to recommend content that corresponds to earlier usage habits. Similarly, through its “For You” section, the BBC’s iPlayer algorithmically recommended programs based on past viewing patterns. However, user discontent meant this feature has since been replaced by one that gives users more autonomy in program selection (Kant, 2014). This highlights the extent to which personalization is automated and, consequently, the question of who personalizes.

The personalization literature distinguishes between explicit and implicit personalization (Fan & Poole, 2006). Explicit personalization is user-initiated (i.e., users participate and actively set their

preferences), whereas implicit personalization is system-initiated (i.e., done automatically by a system based on earlier user behavior and other criteria, such as demographics or location). Through interviews with online editors involved in customization projects and an analysis of user comments and features of explicitly personalizable PSB websites, Sørensen (2013) shows how PSBs' attempts to offer customizable websites failed and were eventually discontinued. Although the reasons for discontinuation are not always completely clear, he offers simple cost-benefit considerations as a general explanation (i.e., that the time and effort required from users was not rewarded in such a way as to convince them to initiate or continue customization). Furthermore, he points to tensions between the ideal of customer sovereignty and editorial agenda setting, hypothesizing that explicit personalization and "customization only (have) value to the user if editorial selection—the agenda setting—is not satisfying the user" (Sørensen, 2013, p. 55). Correspondingly, this may imply that if users are satisfied with how implicit personalization is done, then they are likely to accept and embrace it. PSBs' attempts to implicitly personalize services through algorithmic selection processes (e.g., by the Swedish PSB companies), however, appear to be impeded by their organizational and professional legacy—among other things, by their majoritarian heritage, caution toward data positivism, and preference for conventional editorial selection (Andersson Schwarz, 2016).

Even though these assessments of PSBs' personalization efforts are inconclusive and they appear to oscillate ambivalently between adoption and reluctance, the importance of personalization technologies is likely to increase. The role they can play in the reinvention of PSB is also being discussed from a viewpoint of media diversity. Such technologies are then not seen as instruments that may inhibit diversity in the sense of isolating echo-chamber effects (Sunstein, 2007) or filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), but as instruments to realize media diversity, namely, by nudging audiences toward more diverse choices (Burri, 2016; Helberger, 2015; Helberger & Burri, 2015). In this context, Burri (2015) envisions a public service navigator, a sort of editorial intelligence, that acts as "a mechanism for influencing the conditions of access to content, particularly its visibility, discoverability, and usability" (p. 1349). Given the abundance of content, Helberger and Burri (2015) even raise the question of whether the PSBs' task can still lie in supplying content and thus contributing to this digital abundance, or whether "their mission (could) be shifting from providing diverse supply to stimulating and enabling users to benefit from the diversity of media content offered elsewhere" (p. 1320). Similarly, van Dijck and Poell (2015) suggest a possible shift from content production to content selection and distribution, arguing that "the future of PSM need not depend on the survival of public broadcasting service as a content-producing institution" (p. 160f).

Personalization is only one element in a wider ensemble of measures aimed at connecting with the user and coping with technological challenges. In essence, personalization can be seen as a kind of responsiveness to audiences, a still predominantly unidirectional and passive approach. PSBs' responsiveness may aim at audience appeal and customer satisfaction through better services, or at voluntarily or involuntarily (i.e., statutory) communicating about the extent to which and how they are fulfilling their public service objectives. Examples of this are annual general reports or more specific public value reports (e.g., the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation's annual public value reports) as well as the above-mentioned mandatory ex ante testing of new or modified services of PSB.

The current reorientation of PSB, however, also involves modes of collaboration with the user or other actors (for the latter, see, e.g., Raats, 2012). Compared with responsiveness, the term *collaboration* refers to a more active, bidirectional, and communicative type of participatory relationship with users and the public. This is increasingly predicated on and enabled by social media and other technologies, which allow for increased audience involvement through feedback opportunities, either by opening up possibilities for users to challenge PSBs and hold them accountable (e.g., in the sense of a “fifth estate”; Dutton, 2009), or as participatory format and strategy initiated by PSBs. The latter have different aims, such as widening individual democratic participation (Council of Europe, 2009); regenerating civic engagement (Debrett, 2015); legitimizing PSB’s institutional role, expanding its activities to digital platforms, and generating new forms of revenue in the light of financial challenges (Enli, 2008); or appealing to younger audiences by involving them in the production process and letting them create content themselves (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2016).

The integration of social media in the professional practice of PSB was initially fully embraced under the assumption that they were guided by a similar public ethos of engaging and involving audiences as citizens as ideally pursued by PSB. This engagement, however, soon led to controversies with private competitors who questioned whether such activities pertain to a public service remit, and to clashes between the soon exclusively commercially driven social media platforms and the institutional mission, editorial practice, and production values of PSB (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). Van Dijck and Poell (2015) analyze this contentious encounter between public and social elements as a struggle on the institutional, professional, and content levels and show how the

dual attraction–suspicion attitude toward social media as public platforms has resulted in a cautionary approach toward their monetizing intentions, varying from an outright ban on “social buttons” on PSB platforms to professional sets of guidelines on how to use them responsibly. (p. 154)

Similar to other adaptation strategies by PSBs in the face of commercial competition and technological change (e.g., adoption of commercial formats, increase in entertainment and participatory programming, or the personalization trials discussed above), the issue of making PSB social again highlights the question of defining and rearticulating *public* or *publicness* as well as *value* in this continuously growing and changing media ecosystem (also see van Dijck & Poell, 2015).

### ***Permissible According to Core Principles?***

Many of these responsiveness or collaboration strategies are subject to controversy because they are seen as a transgression of the traditional PSB turf. Recourse to the three core principles of “service public”—namely, equality, continuity, and adaptability—allows an appraisal of their permissibility. These principles originated in France in the 1930s, triggered by Louis Rolland, thus known as “Lois de Rolland” (Rolland’s laws; Segalla, 2006). Although a similarly sophisticated and especially legally protected public service doctrine has not been equally recognized in other jurisdictions, these principles are nonetheless shared implicitly or explicitly. They are also reflected in European policy discourses regarding public

undertakings and public service activities as well as services of general interest (European Economic and Social Committee, 2002; European Parliament, 1996, 2004).

In particular, the concept of adaptability appears relevant because it relates to the responsibility and right to regularly adapt the public service subject to developments in that need, and by taking account of political priorities, the needs of societies, and technical and economic developments. A positive reading of adaptability would then back the various strategies so long as they can be “proved” to be serving the public interest. A negative reading, however, may also allow an institutional rearrangement or even a complete withdrawal of the service.

A radical turning away from a PSB organization was seen in Greece with the sudden and controversial shutdown of ERT in 2013; a similar incident was the closure of Nou Televisió/Ràdio Televisió Valenciana in Valencia, Spain, in 2013. Other proposals for institutional reform are suggestions to privatize the more commercially oriented parts of PSB, to disentangle the public remit from its institutional/organizational structure and establish (endowment) funding for public service content (Latzer, 1997), or to merge organizations—for example, the Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer’s proposal in September 2016 to merge the two German PSB organizations ARD and ZDF. Increasingly, the role of PSB as a stand-alone institution is being questioned. Murdock (2005) envisions it, for example, “as the principal node in an emerging network of public and civil initiatives that, taken together, provide the basis for new shared cultural space, a digital commons” (p. 214).

In the context of this reconstruction, civil society is seen as the key element on which the survival and independence of PSB depends, making it even more important that PSB is increasingly accountable to its citizenry and that they also sincerely feel this accountability (e.g., Nissen, 2016). However, what is important to note is that the views of the public or the citizen on the *general idea* of public service play hardly any role in these debates. Even if the user as citizen is rhetorically employed as the target of the responsiveness and collaboration endeavors of PSB, it appears that the dominant paradigm of audience research, which construes audiences exclusively as consumers (Hasebrink, 2011), still prevails. Studies thus focus mostly on the use or reach of PSB programs, their quality coupled with performance, or differences in image between private media and PSB (e.g., the results of the ARD/ZDF long-term study, or Ofcom’s PSB Annual Research Reports). The next section, therefore, aims to fill this research gap and focuses on the perceptions of the public as citizenry regarding the significance of the general idea of public service in times of media change and the assessment of how well the SRG fulfills this public service remit.

The SRG is widely comparable to other Western European PSBs. However, unlike most of its counterparts, it is organized as a private association with a public service remit. Corresponding to the four language regions in Switzerland (German, French, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romanic), it is made up of four subsidiary bodies, membership of which is open to anyone (about 23,000 members in 2017). The association operates the company SRG, which in turn is composed of five enterprise units—one for each language region and an international service. SRG derives around 75% of its revenues from license fees and about 25% from commercial activities. To guarantee the same quality of programming throughout Switzerland, the SRG cross-subsidizes between the language regions.



### A Case Study of How the Public Values PSB

This section explores the perceptions of the Swiss population regarding the general importance of the idea of public service in times of the Internet and the fulfillment of this remit by the SRG in particular. It also scrutinizes how and whether individual values and the institutional value of "public service" are related. The data for this case study were collected as part of a PSB and values module that was integrated into the representative World Internet Project Switzerland 2015 survey (Latzer, Büchi, & Just, 2015). The sample ( $N = 1,121$ ) is representative of the Swiss population between the ages of 14 and 84 years, according to age, gender, region, and employment status. Respondents were contacted on landline and mobile phones between May 27, 2015, and June 29, 2015.

The survey period coincided with a period of heightened public debate and media coverage on the future of the SRG and the public service during a closely contested referendum on a new PSB fee system (June 14, 2015). This new system, which involves a departure from a fee subject to available equipment to a general household fee, was approved by a slim majority (50.1% vs. 49.9%). Altogether, this indicates an increased sensitization to the issue of public service and PSB during the survey period.

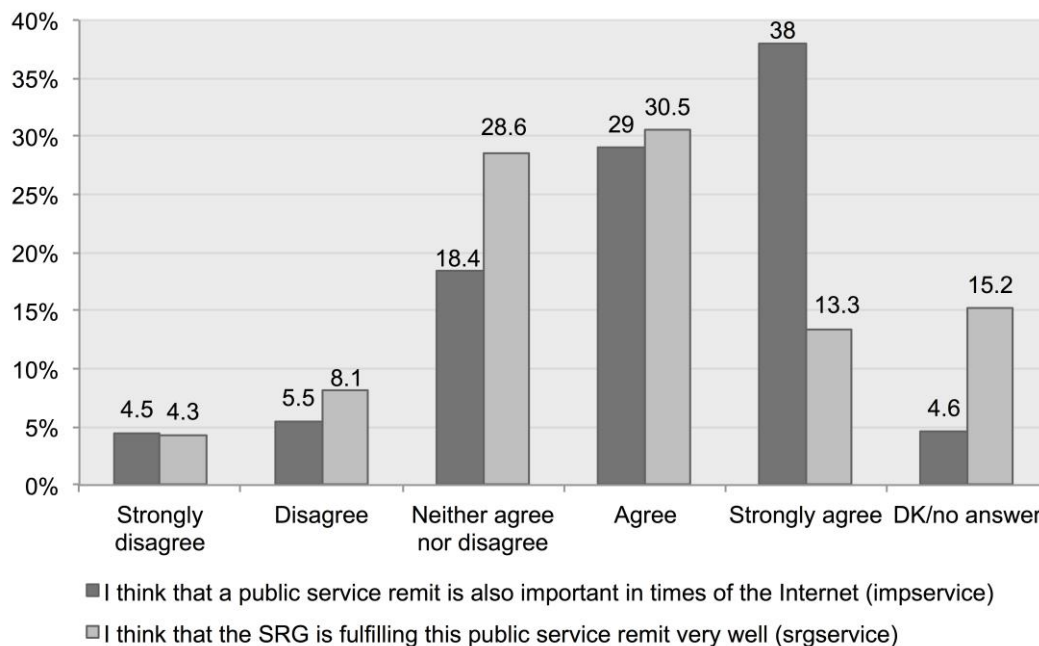
Respondents were introduced to the issue with a statement indicating that there is a public service remit in the media sector in Switzerland, which is currently fulfilled by the SRG, and that the interviewer would be interested in their opinions on this because of the Internet and changing media usage patterns. On a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, the respondents were asked to assess the following statements: "I think that a public service remit is also important in times of the Internet (impservice)" and "I think that the SRG is fulfilling this public service remit very well (srgservice)."

The first item is the core dependent variable and concerns the general appraisal of an essentially institutional value, that is, of "socially shared cognitive representations of institutional goals and demands" (Rokeach, 1979, p. 50). The statement refers to the general desirability of public service and invokes people's reflective preferences, namely, meta preferences, as opposed to individual preferences (Brennan & Lomasky, 1983; Kiefer, 2003). This institutional value of PSBs is incorporated in their public service, which is the distinctive and defining characteristic of PSBs like the SRG. Even though there is no universal definition of *public service*, it is generally associated with certain expectations and tasks. In the absence of precise definitions, these are usually described and circumscribed in the relevant regulatory frameworks and often communicated by PSBs through mission statements and other institutional publications. In Switzerland, for example, and similar to other countries, there is no precise definition of public service, but it is specified by a mandate, which is predicated on the Swiss Federal Constitution (Article 93), and then further explicated along general lines in the Federal Act and the Federal Ordinance on Radio and Television as well as in the license. These expectations and tasks generally include aspects like universal and affordable accessibility and appeal, contribution to national identity, social cohesion, education and knowledge, and representation of diversity and consideration of minorities. The second statement then addresses the extent to which the SRG fulfills these and succeeds in implementing the institutional value of "public service."

Descriptive statistical analyses of the variable distributions, linear regression, and structural equation modeling were applied to assess the appraisal of PSB in Switzerland, analyze differences along socioeconomic groups, and test the explanatory power of human values with regard to the public's perception of the idea of public service.

### ***Appraisal of PSB in Switzerland***

Overall, the very strong agreement of the general importance of a public service in times of the Internet is significantly higher (38%) than the strong agreement with the statement that the SRG is fulfilling this remit very well (13.3%; see Figure 1). While two thirds of the Swiss population (67%) agree or strongly agree with the general importance of public service, less than half (43.8%) think that the SRG is doing a very good job in fulfilling it. At the same time, there is only low opposition (disagree or strongly disagree) to the importance of a public service in general (10%) and the extent to which the SRG is fulfilling it well (13.6%). Respondents who indicated disagreement with both questions amounted to only 4.5% of the population. In general, responses to the two questions were significantly correlated ( $r = .45$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ), meaning that placing higher importance on public service in general is associated with higher satisfaction with the SRG.



*N* = 1,121, May–June 2015

**Figure 1. Appraisal of importance of public service in general and of fulfillment by SRG.**

Both the proportions of those who *neither agree nor disagree* (28.6% vs. 18.4%) and those who *do not or cannot answer* (15.2% vs. 4.6%) are higher for the assessment of whether the SRG is fulfilling this remit very well than for the general appraisal of the importance of public service. Altogether, the proportion of those who are indecisive regarding the statement that the SRG is fulfilling this remit very well equals the proportion of those who (strongly) agree with it (both 43.8%).

An explanation for this indecisiveness may be found in the low viewer numbers for SRG programs. Overall, in 2015 the SRG television programs had a market share of about one third of all programs (29.7%) compared with 50% for foreign private programs, 15.6% for foreign PSBs, and 4.6% for private Swiss broadcasters (Schweizerischer Bundesrat, 2016). Actual consumption experience is regarded as a prerequisite for the rational appraisal of complex goods like media goods (Kiefer, 2003). While the first statement invokes a reflective judgment of the importance of public service in general, the second requires a concrete assessment with which many may have felt uneasy due to nonconsumption of SRG programs.

Declining audience shares among younger generations and their increased use of the Internet are seen as threats to the viability of PSB in times of media change. A technological and cultural split between the PSB generation (older than age 40) and the PSM generation (age 40 and younger) has been suggested (Jakubowicz, 2010), which is said to require particular attention by PSBs in terms of programming strategies and selection of distribution channels. Therefore, the question of how sociodemographic characteristics like age relate to the appraisal of public service in times of the Internet deserves further attention.

Surprisingly, descriptive statistical analyses of the agreement with both the value of public service and its fulfillment reveal almost no variations in terms of sociodemographic or socioeconomic groups. For both statements, the proportion of men who (strongly) agree is significantly higher than the proportion of women (70.9% vs. 63.2% for *imp*service, and 47.9% vs. 39.8% for *srg*service). At the same time, the proportion of women who neither agree nor disagree or who do not or cannot answer the question is significantly higher (27.6% women vs. 18.3% men).

Education plays an important role with regard to the assessment of the importance of public service in general, but not for (strongly) agreeing with whether the SRG fulfills this service very well. The higher the education level, the greater the agreement with the statement that a public service is also important in times of the Internet. While 55% of the less well-educated (strongly) agree, this rises to 66.2% for those with a medium and to 74.4% for those with a higher education level.

There are no variations in terms of age with regard to the (strong) agreement of the relevance of a public service in times of the Internet. Regarding the statement of whether the SRG fulfills this remit very well, there is a difference between the PSM and PSB generations, with almost half of the latter (47.3%) showing (strong) agreement compared with less than two fifths of the PSM generation (37.7%).

A linear regression with key sociodemographic variables (age, gender, education, language region) confirms the descriptive finding that higher education is associated with higher valuation of the

importance of public service, however, with an overall low effect. Unlike the descriptive results, in this multivariate model, neither gender nor any of the other variables significantly predict agreement with the statement that a public service is also important in times of the Internet. Furthermore, none of the sociodemographics, including age and gender, play any role in explaining how well the SRG fulfills this remit. Language region was not significant either. This is noteworthy, because—compared with the German-speaking majority—the smaller populations in the French, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romanic language regions benefit disproportionately from the PSB fee due to internal cross-subsidies.

Overall, sociodemographic variation in the valuation of public service importance is very low ( $R^2 = 1.3\%$ ), indicating that the appraisal of the institutional value of “public service” is independent of sociodemographics and that there is thus a universal normative agreement on its importance.

### ***The Role of Values: An Explanatory Model***

To shed more light on the perceptions of individuals toward public service, this article further examines the relationship between people’s perception of public service and their individual human value priorities. Individual values are considered central to understanding social behavior because they may guide and explain attitudes (e.g., Rokeach, 1973) and also influence the direction and speed of social change (Schwartz, 2007).

To scrutinize this link between human values and citizens’ perceptions on PSB, this article draws on the well-validated theory of value structure and content developed by Schwartz (e.g., 1992, 2007), which has been incorporated into the European Social Survey (e.g., ESS, 2016).

This article surveys three basic values that are considered particularly important for the appreciation of PSB: security (desire of feeling safe and stable), hedonism (desire for pleasure, self-indulgence), and self-direction (desire to be self-governing). Each value was measured with two items, which were rephrased to the first person and recorded on a 5-point agreement scale to conform to the structure of the rest of the survey (see Table 1).

These values represent the opposing dimensions of conservatism versus openness to change. They also denote the supposed difference between the PSB generation and the PSM generation (Jakubowicz, 2010). The former are described as traditionalists, universalists, and collectivists, the latter as acquirers, hedonists, and independents. In fact, there are corresponding generational differences in our data regarding values. Hedonism is more pronounced ( $p \leq .001$ ) in the PSM generation ( $M = 4.03$ ) than in the PSB generation ( $M = 3.79$ ), and the security value is lower ( $p \leq .001$ ) in the PSM generation ( $M = 3.96$ ) than in the PSB generation ( $M = 4.15$ ). Self-direction, however, is not significantly different ( $p = .244$ ) across these generations.

Because this is the first study of the relationship between individual values and the institutional value of “public service” of PSBs, no explicit hypotheses are anticipated. Given the general concerns with younger generations’ alleged renunciation of PSB and the apparent generational differences in the values as indicated above, it may be assumed that a supportive attitude toward the idea of public service

correlates positively with values that stress security, whereas respondents with value priorities in support of change and novelty approve of it less.

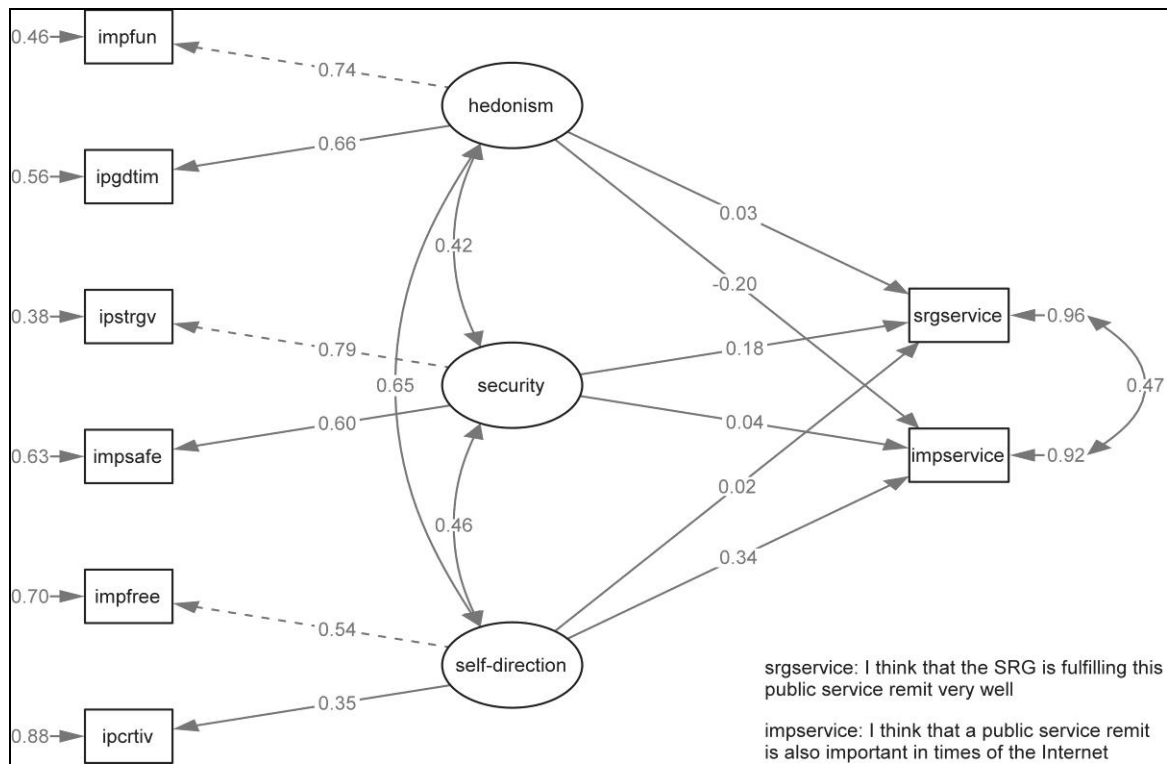
**Table 1. Measurement Items for the Three Values.**

Values	Items	M, SD
Security	"It is important to me to live in secure surroundings. I avoid anything that might endanger my safety." (impsafe)	$M = 4.00$ , $SD = 0.98$
	"It is important to me that the government ensures my safety against all threats. I want the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens." (ipstrgv)	$M = 4.17$ , $SD = 0.96$
Self-direction	"Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to me. I like to do things in my own original way." (ipctiv)	$M = 4.04$ , $SD = 1.05$
	"It is important to me to make my own decisions about what I do. I like to be free and not depend on others." (impfree)	$M = 4.41$ , $SD = 0.78$
Hedonism	"Having a good time is important to me. I like to 'spoil' myself." (ipgdtim)	$M = 4.12$ , $SD = 0.93$
	"I seek every chance I can to have fun. It is important to me to do things that give me pleasure." (impfun)	$M = 3.63$ , $SD = 1.04$

A measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was constructed for the three values and evaluated by the  $\chi^2$  value, degrees of freedom ( $df$ ),  $\chi^2/df$ , comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2015; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003; see Figure 2). The three-value model fits the data reasonably well with  $\chi^2 = 27.61$  ( $p \leq .001$ ),  $df = 6$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 4.60$ , CFI = 0.975, TLI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.057, and SRMR = 0.020. Factor loadings are above .60 for hedonism and security, whereas self-direction has lower loadings of .57 and .34 (all significant at the .001 level).

To evaluate these results, the distributions and correlations of the value items were cross-checked using the Swiss subsample of the sixth European Social Survey (ESS, 2016). The fit in the ESS data is marginally worse, but shows essentially the same pattern of loadings. The three values are significantly and positively correlated with each other, indicating that higher scores on one factor are on average associated with higher scores on the other two.

Even though three of the six effects of human values on the attitudes toward public service broadcasting in Switzerland are significant at the .05 level, the values for  $R^2$  of 8% and 4% show that the explanatory power of human values for the appraisal of PSB is low. *Self-direction* ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p = .019$ ) positively predicts PSB importance, *security* ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p = .002$ ) positively predicts satisfaction with SRG, and *hedonism* ( $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $p = .044$ ) negatively predicts PSB importance.



**Figure 2. The role of values in the appraisal of public service.**

Once the sample was split into PSM and PSB generations and analyzed in a multigroup structural equation model, the picture was similar, yet some effects lost their significance. Again with low explanatory power, in both the PSB ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $p = .037$ ) and the PSM generation ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p = .032$ ), security was a positive predictor of satisfaction with the SRG. In the PSB generation, self-direction ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p = .048$ ) positively predicted PSB importance. There were no other significant effects of the human values in either generation.

Altogether, these results show that the perception of the institutional value of “public service” is not related to individual values, further supporting the existence of a collectively shared normative agreement on its importance that appears to transcend both sociodemographic characteristics and individual values.

### Concluding Remarks

Critics often challenge PSBs and their importance in today’s media ecology on the grounds of their declining audience reach, the proliferation of alternative outlets and content, and attendant changes in media consumption patterns. These are easily measurable and available indicators, which to some extent show the state of constitution the organization PSB is in. However, they fall short of also capturing

the state of constitution of the underlying institutional value (i.e., of the importance of the idea of public service). The discrepancy between the relatively high appraisal of the importance of public service in times of the Internet (38% strongly agree, 29% agree) and the considerably lower agreement with the statement that the SRG is doing a very good job in fulfilling it (13.3% strongly agree, 30.5% agree) indicates that the institutional value of "public service" is operative and prevails widely independently of how well the organization associated with it is judged. Furthermore, the result that the assessment of public service cannot be predicted by sociodemographics or individual values suggests that public service is a value that has become a widely shared, socially solidified principle, reflecting something desirable and meaningful beyond individual consumer preferences, in this case, to the Swiss citizenry. However, this does not constitute an argument in favor of PSB as is. Rather, it may indicate the relatively slow pace of institutional change, where changes in the perceived value of public service lag behind visible changes, such as decreasing consumption of PSB programs or perceived problems regarding utility and performance. Altogether this calls for further attention in research and politics toward the many questions relating to the formation, transmission, and change of such institutional values as a basis for policies for or against the idea of public service and its organizational specifics.

Furthermore, comparative research may give insights into the extent to which citizens of other countries place a similar or dissimilar value on the institutional idea of PSB. Presumably, the history and the tradition of the institutionalization of PSB influence the social acceptance and endorsement of such values. It is therefore likely that other Western European countries with similar institutionalization processes share Switzerland's supportive attitude toward the idea of PSB. Likewise, given the history and legacy of PSB in Eastern European transitional economies, the assessment of the value of PSB may be met with greater skepticism and less social consensus on its value.

In addition, longitudinal research may be able to reveal the phenomenon of deinstitutionalization, a process by which institutions weaken over time and potentially eventually disappear (Scott, 2001). Rapid or radical deinstitutionalization appears unlikely in Western European countries because of the relatively slow pace of change of socially embedded informal institutions like norms, customs, and traditions, or the institutional environment with the formal rules of the game (Williamson, 2000) that keeps PSB in place. Nonetheless, strong pressures on PSBs throughout Western Europe, often coupled with rising populism, indicate that neither the idea nor the organization of PSB are immune to challenge, reassessment, and even rejection.

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